



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 20:32–38

“The Integrity of Paul’s Ministry: Part III”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Acts chapter 20, verse 32 through verse 38, which is the conclusion of the apostle’s ministry that he gave to the elders of the church at Ephesus. On his way home to Jerusalem, at the conclusion of his third missionary journey, the apostle evidently avoiding going into the city of Ephesus because of the delay it might bring, asked that the elders of the church might meet him at Miletus, which was about twenty or thirty miles down the coast from Ephesus, and there he gave them this magnificent message, recorded by Luke in his history of the early church.

One of the significant things about it, which we’ve said several times, is that this is the only illustration in Luke’s writings of a message delivered to a believing church body. And so, for that reason, it has some special significance for us. The fact that it was addressed to the elders of the church at Ephesus makes it, therefore, very significant. And I, for one, always learn something from the study of it, and I hope that our study of it again has benefited some of you. Now, the message itself concludes with a kind of farewell, and that’s the beginning of our Scripture reading at verse 32 through verse 38. Luke writes, giving at least the essence of the words of Paul, says.

“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

Now, lest there be any question about this, I hadn’t planned on saying anything about it in the message that follows, the term “all them which are sanctified” is inclusive of all Christians, because all believers have been sanctified, that is, set apart by the Lord God for special relationship to him. That’s why all believers are called saints or sanctified ones. I know it might seem strange to you to think of calling a man a saint; but that is only the emphasis and the feeling that one derives from the fact the Christian church has often made unbiblical usage of the term saint. Believe it or not, Mr. Prier is a saint. [Laughter] And just as much a saint as any other saint; and, in fact, more of a saint than lots of those who, historically, have been given the name of saint. So you have my permission to call him Saint Howard [Laughter] if you wish. And we’ll all back you up in that. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, and in the very first few verses of that epistle, remember, he spoke to all who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus. So it’s simply a term that looks at our salvation as that which marks us out for special use, and as especially belonging to the Lord. Well, that’s all we’ll say about it today. Paul continues verse 33.

“I have coveted no man’s silver or gold or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

This, as I mentioned once before at least is one of the *agrapha*, that is, things not written in the gospels, but, nevertheless, known to the early church; sayings of our Lord which are not in, put in the gospel records. John tells us, you know, at the end of his gospel, the Lord Jesus did many things which are not recorded here. In fact, he said, if we were to try and record them, the world couldn’t contain the books. So there were many things our Lord did, many things that he said, that the early church knew about, but which have been lost down through the years. This was one of the things that he said, which was known to Paul, and which he cites here. One of the *agrapha*, things not

written or sometimes called logia, the things our Lord said but which the gospel writers have not recorded.

“And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word.

[Message] We have been considering in our study of Paul’s message to the Ephesian elders, the integrity of his ministry. His ministry to the elders, I believe I mentioned in the very first of these series of three messages on this, his message was a vindication or contains a vindication of his ministry and exhortation to the elders of the church.

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He hath purchased with the blood of His own one.”

And that it concludes with a farewell commendation of them to the care of God. Now, we have looked at the vindication of the apostle’s ministry although that note will again come before us in the farewell. We have looked at the exhortation given to the Ephesian elders. And so, today, we come to his words of farewell to them. The final section is full of wise and tender counsel, as one might expect. And it concerns, it seems to me, two things preeminently: First of all, the preeminence of the word of grace. Notice the statement in verse 32. “And now brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace.” And then notice the 24th verse, where this note of grace again occurs where he says, “And the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the

grace of God.” So the preeminence of the word of grace comes before us and we’re going to lay a great deal of stress upon that in the message that follows, because it seems to me that we cannot understand Christianity if we do not understand grace. And the very fact that the apostle lays such stress upon it indicates that he would concur in that too.

In fact, the thing that distinguishes Christianity from all other religions is the principle of grace. No other system of truth, that claims to bring man into relationship with God, contains that principle of grace as Christianity does. All other systems of truth, all other religions, all other philosophies, that claim to bring man into relationship to the Lord God are grounded in the principle of works or human merit. Christianity in its purest form is grounded simply in the grace of God.

Furthermore, the apostle lays stress upon the fact that this grace of God is ministered to us, not through an organization, nor through any sacramental system, but ministered to us directly through the Holy Spirit. Paul and Luke know nothing of the idea that the church leaders stand over the Word committed to them and are in control of it. On the contrary, they stand under the Word of God. The very idea that the church has given us the Word is one thing that the apostles would have vigorously opposed. The thought that the Word of God has come to us from the church is directly contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures. The teaching of the Scriptures is that the church has come into existence by virtue of the truth of the Word of God. In other words, the Word of God is responsible for the church; the church is not responsible for the Word of God. So we should never forget that. There is, of course, a sense in which the early church was guided by the Holy Spirit in the recognition of what God through the Holy Spirit had done, in the writing of Scripture. But that’s a far cry from saying the church is over the Word and controls the Word and has given us the Word. All that the church has done is to recognize what God has done through the Holy Spirit, and the church itself is the product of the Word of God as ministered by the Holy Spirit. So those apostles and others recognized that they were under the Word.

There is an old story about Adolf Schlatter, the well-known German evangelical professor and preacher of the earlier part of the twentieth century. Schlatter, with Theodor Zahn were the two

outstanding German evangelical scholars. And anyone who reads German literature theologically of the earlier part of the century and wants to read evangelical literature, will read Zahn and Schlatter. They both were evangelical men and both recognized scholars, even by those who didn’t hold their views. There was a man who was introduced to Schlatter one time, and he spoke to the professor and he said to him, “I’m so delighted to be able to meet a person who stands upon the Word of God, and holds a position such as you have.” And Professor Schlatter said to him, “I’d like for you to know, I do not stand upon the Word of God; I stand under the Word of God.” And that, of course, is the way in which we are related to the Word of God. We are under it.

So I’m not surprised that Paul says, “And brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that have been sanctified.”

Now, the other thing that appears here and on which we will spend less time is the emphasis upon Paul’s own financial practices. Now, that’s evident, not only from things that he says here, but things that the apostle says in his epistles. But he states them here again, very plainly. “I have coveted no man’s silver or gold or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. And in all things I have showed you, that sole laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

The apostle in his ministry did not refuse to take gifts. He did take gifts; he took gifts from the church at Philippi. One well-known evangelical scholar says, “He seems almost apologetic about it but, nevertheless, he took those gifts.” But the apostle felt that he must support himself, in order that he might gain a reward, and, also, in order that there would be no criticism of the gospel that he preached.

We all know that the world is constantly besieged by Christians who are asking for the world’s money. In fact, that’s the general impression that much of the world has of a church. They

think of a church as a place where you go on Sunday morning, and you hear a sermon, but you also, have the offering plates passed.

Did you notice? We don’t have any offering plates passed in Believers Chapel. That’s because the elders want you to realize, me too, that the gospel is free of charge. It is something that we give; and, therefore, the offering is like communion. It’s for believers. Putting money in the collection plate will not advance you one step toward heaven. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is the way to eternal life.

Now, the apostle, I think, would have been very much in harmony with that. In 1 Corinthians chapter 9, he said, “I have the right to expect support, because the Scriptures teach that those who labor in the Word of God, should receive the support of those who have their ministry.” The apostle makes it plain in 1 Corinthians 9, that if an individual shares with us God’s spiritual things, given to him, we are responsible to share with him our fleshly or carnal things. So he doesn’t deny the principle. In fact, he says that the apostles had the right to “lead about a sister, or a wife, as well as the other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?” And he said, “Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?” A man doesn’t go at his own charges in warfare. He’s supported. “Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of the fruit thereof? Or who feeds a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?” So he said, I have a perfect right to do that. But, he said, there is something different about my ministry from the apostles. The apostles followed the Lord in a voluntary way. He said to them, one by one, “Follow me?” But, in my case, I was on the road to Damascus, to persecute the Christian church, and God intervened. And he forced me into the ministry; and, consequently, the apostles, who voluntarily followed the Lord, may have a reward from their voluntary following of the Lord; but in my case, I didn’t voluntarily follow the Lord. I was forced into the ministry. How am I going to get a reward then? By making the gospel free of charge.

Now, that’s what he says. I’ll read it for you. I’m sure most of you are familiar with it. He writes the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 9:15, after saying that those the Lord has ordained to preach the gospel should live of the gospel, he says, “But I have used none of these things: Neither have I

written these things, that it might be so done unto me.” In other words, Paul says, “I’m not bringing this up, by the way, to make you think you ought to give me something.”

We’ve had people stand up in our meetings and tell us what financial difficulties they’ve been in, and the saints are very, very gentle folks, and the saints are often affected by appeals like that. And so the very fact that they told us how, what difficulties they were having financially, meant that the saints would give them something. And , I don’t read peoples’ hearts and minds but I’ve been around a long time and I’ve known a lot who tell us sob stories in order to impress upon you that you ought to give them something, so, Paul says, and the fact that the apostle says it indicates, of course, he knew about it. He says, “I have not written these things that it should be so done unto me: For it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: For necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel. For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: But if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.” That’s Paul’s case. He was willingly persecuting the church and he was forced by God, the Holy Spirit, to change his whole course of life on the Damascus road. Now, he says, “What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.”

Now, if you’ll turn back to chapter 4 of this same epistle to the Corinthians, and if you’ll remember that he wrote this from the city of Ephesus, and you read through this, you will find that the apostle makes reference here to the fact that he did not do anything in Ephesus but work with his own hands. So the apostle lays great stress upon the fact that his own financial practices are above reproach. He is voluntarily bringing the gospel and working to support himself, so that the Ephesians and the Corinthians and others, the Philippians did give him money, they might realize that the gospel is something that God gives us. And Paul wanted us to understand that so far as he was concerned, he was doing this out of the sense of necessity laid upon him by the Lord God. What a magnificent man Paul the apostle was.

Now, we have been, ourselves, exposed this week to lots of words about sports figures, not only in Dallas but all over the sports world. Everybody is out for his own dollar. And in the business world, the same is true. We have a society, which is so materialistic, that it even gets very touchy if the subject is brought up. It’s such a relief to read of a person who had his priorities right, that the first priority of all is our relationship to the Lord God. So the apostle says, “I have coveted no man’s silver or gold, or apparel. These hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.” I not only supported myself, but I helped support those who were ministering the gospel with me; a tremendous figure, Paul the Apostle.

Now, let’s turn to our section that we’re going to look at. We’re going to look first at the apostolic committal, a tender, touching, yet significant goodbye. The apostle writes, in verse 32, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God.” Now, that’s a tremendous statement. “I commend you to God.” Because, remember, Paul has loomed large in the conversion of the Ephesians, and he has been the primary figure in the building up of the Ephesians. And now, he is saying, I’m leaving. I can just imagine how people would feel. Paul’s leaving. What are we going to do? And so Paul says, “I commend you to God.” It’s very much like the apostle to say, “Paul may go, but He will never go.” Under-shepherds die, the Great Shepherd who has come forth from the dead, he lives on. Jacob, when he was dying, said to his family, “I die; but God shall be with you.” Moses, as he knew that his days were coming to an end, said, “The Lord hath said unto me, thou shall not go over this Jordan. The Lord thy God, he will go before you.” Moses will die, Jehovah does not die. Paul says, “I’m going, I commend you to God.”

The rest of the apostles must have felt that when the Lord Jesus died that they would be lost and bereft in the world. The Lord Jesus satisfied that natural longing by telling them, “After I’m gone, the Holy Spirit will come. The Holy Spirit will indwell each of you, and I will be with you in a more significant and intimate way after I am gone than I am now. Because now, I’m limited in physical presence, but then the Holy Spirit shall permanently indwell each of you and the fact that I

am gone will not mean that you are limited in any way.” In fact, he says, “It’s expedient for you that I go away. If I go not away, the Holy Spirit will not come.”

The test of a good doctor is, he can do something for us that makes him needed no longer. We don’t like doctors who keep us coming. We like a doctor to whom we can go and after we’ve seen him a few times, can say to us, “Well, now, you no longer need to come.” The same thing is true of the ministry of the Word of God. The minister of the Word of God, who is able to say, “You don’t need me any longer,” is the ministry that is most effective. The ministry that brings a person into relationship to the Lord God and then can leave with the people in touch with God—that is the ministry that really counts.

Now, anyone can look at me and know that I’m not going to be here forever. But one thing I would like to be encouraged about; and that is, that when I go, the individuals in Believers Chapel, who have been under the ministry of the Word of God, that part that I have given, that those believers may have the sense of touch with the Lord God. And that when I go, they may sense that they can go on in an even more significant and fruitful way. So “I commend you to God.” I think that’s interesting that the apostle puts it first, because, after all, the Word comes from God, “I commend you to God.”

Now, he says, “and I commend you to the word of His grace.” In verse 24, he had spoken about the “gospel of the grace of God.” It seems to me that in the apostle’s thinking, it was most fundamental that we think of the Word of God as the word of grace. In other words, if I had one simple, single idea, which would be fundamental to Christianity, it’s the idea of grace.

Now, the fact that grace is the fundamental idea of Christianity, is confirmed by the fact that it is grace that most glorifies God; for, it is grace that lays stress upon the fact that our blessings proceed from the Lord God and not from ourselves. We talk about “the word of His grace” given by grace. The gospel, the Good News, the good news of grace; that is, that God ministers to us and saves men and keeps men himself; and that our responsibility is to be simply a recipient. It is the distinguishing Christian doctrine, contrary to works of all kinds.

So I’d like to, for a few moments, ring the changes a bit on this, and say to you that grace says that salvation is of the Lord. That’s put very simply, but that’s what grace says. Grace says salvation is of the Lord. Grace, well, it means God’s unmerited favor to those who deserve the opposite; and one of these acronym type of definitions we might say, grace , G-R-A-C-E , is God’s riches at Christ’s expense. But grace tells us that salvation is of the Lord, first of all, in its conception. That is, before there were ever any angels, before there was ever a daystar, before there was ever a creation, before there were ever men upon the earth, God had devised his plan of salvation through grace.

Listen to what he writes to Timothy, in the second letter to him in the 9th verse of the 1st chapter. He talks about the Lord Jesus, “Who has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” So the initiating power behind the saving work of the Triune God is the Lord God Himself. Grace says salvation is of the Lord in its conception.

Secondly, grace says salvation is of the Lord in its revelation. He initiated it all the way. We did not beg for grace; God initiated his plan and began to carry it out by taking the initiative. It is he who did it. One can see that in the Garden of Eden. It is God who came down after Adam and Eve have sinned, to seek them. The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost. In your salvation, it was not you who sought God; it was God who sought you. And if you thought that you sought God first, it’s only because you didn’t recognize that he was already working in your heart. “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him,” the Lord Jesus said. So salvation is of the Lord in its revelation; from creation to its conclusion, God takes the initiative. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it this way. He says, “In olden days and in many parts and in many ways, God spoke to the fathers by the prophets. But in these last days, he has spoken to us in such a person as a Son.”

Now, don’t read that without realizing that what that author is saying is that God has taken the initiative in his desire to have fellowship with us; it is he who has spoken; and he has spoken in

his Son. And the very fact that he speaks signifies a desire to have fellowship. That’s why people speak to other people; that’s why I may greet you in the hall and say, “Good morning, how are you?” Or you may greet me and say, “Good morning, how are you?” That’s an attempt to introduce to one another some kind of communication. Sometimes it’s an indication of no communications; but, nevertheless, that’s the idea of speaking, the idea of fellowship. And so God has spoken in the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is of the Lord and its revelation.

And salvation is of the Lord, thirdly, in its execution. The work of salvation is the unaided work of the Lord Jesus Christ. As one of the prophets of the Old Testament, perhaps the greatest one, Isaiah in chapter 63 in verse 3, speaking of the work of the Messiah, giving words that the Messiah speaks, has the Messiah say, “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me.” Our Lord was alone in the manger; he was alone in the desert, in the temptation; he was alone on the mountaintop of the transfiguration; he was alone in Gethsemane, having left the apostles behind; he was alone on the cross at Calvary. Throughout his ministry, that ministry was his own unaided work. It is of the Lord in its execution. And salvation is of the Lord in its application. It is striking, a testimony to the sinfulness of the human heart, that we have attempted to mix human works with divine grace; and thus destroy the gospel of the grace of God. How have we done it? Well, in very many “creative” works. Only God creates; but we like to use the term because we like to take over God’s work. And so we say, “He’s a creative person.” I’ve never seen a creative person. Only God is a creative person. There’s some people that are characterized by human originality; but that is about as far as you can go. But when it comes to doctoring up the divine plan of salvation and making it more compatible to human ears, human sinful ears, we are almost creative.

Take the Pelagians. Magnificent gospel of the grace of God, but, after all, we’ve got to do a little work, haven’t we? And so that which God gave men, the law is turned instead of being a means by which we are convicted of sin is made the means by which we are saved from sin. But we can never keep a law. We can never do good works that are satisfactory to a Holy God.

Now, the Christian church abandoned that, and so the semi-Pelagians came along with their doctrine of free will. And in the doctrine of free will, man has sought, again, to take the ultimate source of salvation to himself. After all, don’t we all believe in free will? Yes. It’s almost universally believed. But the Christian church, historically, did not believe in free will. From Augustine, down to the Christian Reformation, free will was anathema in Christian doctrine, because it was recognized that the doctrine of free will; that is, the decision arising from the human heart, unproduced by the Holy Spirit, is a violation of the grace of God. Salvation then is the work of God and the work of man; and the Lutherans and the Calvinists united in opposing that doctrine and the evangelicals of other persuasions as well. But now, the doctrine of free will has practically permeated the evangelical church, and so we’re not surprised that there is no longer the preaching of the grace of God, in its purity and in its magnificence and simplicity. So semi-Pelagian free will.

Arminians have also modified the grace of God by affirming that the Lord Jesus Christ, in his death has secured sufficient grace for all men, so that now all men are able of themselves to make a decision for the Lord God. And those who do are saved; and those who don’t are not saved; again, a confusion of the grace of God, because ultimately, the salvation of man rests with man, fundamentally, and not with God.

Then, the Lutherans, now, I love the Lutherans and I love Martin Luther. Martin Luther did not believe this, but many of the Lutherans came to the view that while it is true that man is in bondage to sin, Luther laid great stress on that. In fact, if anything, a bit more stress than John Calvin. But he was very strong on that. But then the Lutherans came to believe that it was within the power of man to resist the gospel, and that salvation, ultimately, rested not with those who affirmed the decision of their free will, which they rejected for they rejected free will and semi-Pelagianism, but salvation lies with those who do not resist the gospel. But, again, the same principle is at stake. What is there that makes one person free not to resist, as over against another who resists? It’s ultimately something in the human heart. And so finally, we come to the purity of the grace of God;

for the Bible says that men are dead in their trespasses and sins; and, therefore, they cannot of themselves make a decision for the Lord God.

We talk about election, Paul calls it the election of grace, that’s the first moving of God’s grace that ultimately leads to our salvation. It has its origin, our salvation in the grace of God toward us, which proceeds from the heart of God in ages past. This is so beautifully expressed all through the New Testament that one wonders how you can miss it; except, that we know we are born blind to spiritual things. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God; they are foolishness to him. Neither can he know them. They are spiritually discerned.” And the growth in the knowledge of the grace of God, and in the purity of it, is part of our sanctification. I’ll repeat it again. We are all born as Pharisees, we are converted as Arminians, and it’s the work of sanctification to bring us to Calvinism, so that we understand the fullness of the grace of God.

Now, I don’t take that too seriously, but after all, most of us who think that we understand better now the grace of God at one time were confused about it. And I don’t mean to say that many of my Arminian believers who say, “I believe in the grace of God,” are not saved. I do think they are saved. If they say they are believing in the grace of God, I say, well, as far as I’m concerned, you have as much right in the body of Christ as I, maybe even more so. I only say this, it’s possible, and I think any honest Christian will admit this, it’s possible to be confused about things that you affirm. And, it’s possible to grow in the knowledge of the truth, which you have affirmed. I know it’s true because in my case that’s true. So I like to say, that when a person says to me, “God looked down, through the years, and he saw who would believe and he elected them.” Well, that’s nice that you really believe that, but I just hope you come to a purer understanding of the gospel. Because, you see, if God really looked down through the years and saw who would believe and elected them, what’s the point of election? There is no need for God to elect if they are going to believe. And, furthermore, does not God gain in knowledge? And if he gains in knowledge, how can we say that God is an omniscient God? He has gained in knowledge. And, as a matter of fact, when it comes ultimately to salvation, the salvation that we are talking about is a salvation in which man is the fundamental actor

and God is the spectator, who sees what man is doing and simply affirms it. Now, it seems to me that a person cannot hold a doctrine like that and say, “I believe in the grace of God.” That’s what we proclaim.

Mr. Spurgeon used to like to tell the story of Saint Dennis. Now, I don’t know whether he was a saint like Saint Howard, but Saint Dennis is a saint in the Roman Catholic Church. And there is a tradition about Saint Dennis that his head was cut off at one time by a sword, and he reached over and picked up his head and he walked two thousand miles after having had his head cut off. And one of the wits who heard the story is said to have said that so far as the two thousand miles are concerned, “It’s nothing at all. It’s only the first step in which there is some difficulty.” [Laughter]

And so when, after all, it finally will come down to the first step. The first step is the work of God the Holy Spirit, in the human heart. And this is what I and many others, down through the years, have been seeking to make plain and clear among the saints of God. That salvation truly is by grace; and it is not by grace if man takes the first step even though we bath it in all kinds of sanctimonious language.

Fifthly, salvation is of the Lord in its continuation. Salvation is the work of God in saving us; it’s the work of God in sanctifying us. As Paul puts it in Philippians chapter 1 in verse 6, he says, “Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” He began it, he will complete it. But now, someone says, “But doesn’t he say, in the 2nd chapter, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling?” Yes, he does. But he quickly adds, speaking to Christians, “For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do, of His good pleasure.” So he calls upon us to exercise human responsibility and then promises his own saving and sanctifying ministry in response to his commands of us.

And, sixthly, salvation is of the Lord in its preservation. No stalk of grace is given at conversion, which we will use for the rest of our lives, not needing to lean upon the Lord. He gives us grace as our days go by. The Scriptures say, “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” Not as thy months, as thy years, or whatever. It’s “as thy days.” The manna was given and every day the children

of Israel had to go out and they had to eat of the manna. The manna got stale if it remained on the ground. And so, consequently, there was a moment-by-moment daily contact with the Lord God. He promises us, however, that he will be with us. I remember Mr. Spurgeon saying something like, “When I get to heaven, and I finally take my last step into heaven, I will know at that time that it is the Lord God who has given me grace to take that very last step.”

And then, finally, salvation is of the Lord in its completion. In 1 John, chapter 3, verse 1 and verse 2, the apostle of love says, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore, the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” So the Lord God will even do the last. Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it. He will actually begin his work in us and complete it in the presence of the Lord, as the ground of an eternal initiating and enabling power in our lives.

So when the hair of snowy age, I have some, is crowned with perpetual joy and everlasting youth, when the saints on earth are saints in light, when teary eyes are bright as stars, never to be clouded with sorrow again, then shall they sing triumphantly, salvation is of the Lord alone, grace is a shoreless sea.

There will be Arminians in the church of Jesus Christ, while the church is on earth. But there will be no Arminians in heaven. They’ll all understand the grace of God, just as you and I understand it, and will communicate to us down through the centuries in ways that will build us up, but not in their inconsistent understanding of the grace of God in the present time. They’ll understand as we; and they’ll marvel at how they were unable to see it while they were here upon the earth.

As old John Arrowsmith used to refer to Romans 8:29 and 30, he called that a golden chain. God’s foreknowledge, God’s foreordination, God’s calling, God’s justification, God’s glorification; he said, “These are five links in God’s golden chain. God lets them down from heaven that by this

chain he may draw up His elect thither.” And he said, also, “election, having once pitched upon a man, will find him out and call him home, wherever he be.”

Now, notice, in those five steps; they are all of God. He has foreknown us; not foreknown what we would do. He has foreknown us. He has foreordained us. He has called us. He has justified us. And it is so certain that we will be in his presence that he says, not “he will glorify us” but “he has glorified us.” “Five golden links in that chain.”

Well, I think, I can understand Paul, why he’s getting so excited, over the doctrine of the grace of God and why he wants those Ephesian elders to understand grace, as he has proclaimed it to them.

Now, our time is just about up, but we are not through with grace. Grace is something that will occupy us forever. It’s the graceless gospels that have emptied our churches and that have changed our Christians from being forthright witnessing joyous Christians to other kinds, interested in other things. It’s the gospel of a Bultmann, or the gospel of a Pannenberg, or the gospel of a Tillich, or the gospel of a Hendrikus Burkhof, or a gospel of a Wainwright, or a gospel of a Kaufman, or a gospel of a Vapor. All of these kinds of gospels graceless, ultimately, are gospels that have harmed the church, rather than helped the church.

Well, Paul concludes with an exemplary appeal, reminding them he hasn’t coveted their silver, telling them to support the weak, living in the truth of the Lord’s words, reminding them of a saying of the Lord Jesus. “It’s more blessed to give than to receive,” a beatitude illustrated in the whole life of our Lord. You see, some shepherds care more for wool than they do for the sheep. Some shepherds fleece the sheep instead of feeding the sheep. And then, Paul concludes his ministry to them with a farewell. It was customary to pray standing, but the apostle kneels down in solemnity. And kneeling down in solemnity, he prays with the Ephesian elders. And then they fall upon his neck, they weep upon it. They understand grace, they appreciate what the apostle has done, sorrowing because so far as they knew they might never see the beloved apostle again.

So let me say, to conclude our three studies on Paul’s sermon, we see clearly, first, why Paul’s ministry was not impotent, and why his message was not empty. He rejoiced that God had found a way to get the consent of his holy nature to save a soul. Grace had untied the hands of justice and instead of sending men to hell, the Lord God had provided through the Lord Jesus Christ a gracious way for men to be delivered from the just punishment of their sins. Christ bore their penalty. Christ bore their just penalty. And when the Lord Jesus bore their just penalty; and cried out, “It is finished.” The mercy and the love and the grace of God were free to offer this great salvation to all who by the grace of God would come in faith, and lean upon the Lord Jesus Christ, for time and for eternity. “Election is not,” as Mr. Spurgeon said, “a thorn hedge, to keep men from the gospel. The election of the grace of God is an open door.”

And let me remind you, in case there’s some question about this; you know, there are people who say, “If you preach the doctrine of electing grace, how can you preach the gospel to all?” Oh, how, how foolish can we be? How blind can we be? If we do not have the electing grace of God, we have no one saved, for all are lost and bound in sin. It is a testimony to the grace of God that he has elected and he saves a vast multitude of people.

Think about it for a moment. To the newly awakened soul, who is beginning to realize, “Maybe it’s important to settle my eternal destiny,” and he doesn’t know yet whether he’s one of those for whom Christ has died. Now, you wouldn’t have any question about that in some churches, because they never talk about things like that. But in a church where election is mentioned, you might naturally wonder, “Am I one of the elect?” Just reflect for a moment. The Scriptures say that God has resolved to save some. Why not you? We don’t know who God has elected. If he’s elected to save some; why not you? No one can prove you are not one of the elect. Why should you not determine to be one of those? The next question is, the Scriptures reveal the kind of people that God elects. Did you know that? It does. It reveals the kind of people that God elects. What kind are they? Those who call on God. “Whoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved.” Why should I not call on the Lord God, and thus be saved, learning that I am one of the elect, thereby? Those

who come to Christ are also called. For it’s written, “Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out.” The elect are those who call, the elect are those who come. Those who believe on Christ. For does not the Scripture say, “For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” God saves believers in Christ. That Scripture says it. Why should not I be one of those believers? If I don’t want to come, I don’t have any excuse. I get exactly what I want. If I will not call on the name of the Lord, what objection can I raise to the doctrine of election? I don’t want to call on the Lord. If I am not willing to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, I get exactly what I want. Aren’t you satisfied with that? We might say.

And, finally, the Scriptures say that the elect are those who will to believe. See, we don’t deny that man has a will. We don’t deny that men must make a decision of the will. In fact, the Scriptures say, “The Spirit and the bride say come, let him that heareth say come. Let him that is athirst say come. And whosoever will, let him taketh of the water of life freely.” So the elect are those who call on God. The elect are those who come to Christ. The elect are those who believe on Christ. The elect are those who by the grace of God say, “I will come,” and they come, by God’s grace. We only insist that if a person says, “I come” and comes, it is the work of God to bring him there because the Scriptures say, “No man can come, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.”

So if you’re here in the audience this morning, and you don’t want to come, well, then you get exactly what you want. But if you’re in the audience and you want to know you’re one of God’s elect, come to Christ. Believe in Christ. Call upon the Lord God in your heart, to be saved. And you shall be saved. And you’ll discover deep down, within your heart that you are one of God’s elect soul, saved by the grace of God, not by human works, because the Lord God saves sinners.

May God help you to come. May God help you to flee to him, if you have never fled to the Lord Jesus Christ. May you come to know the salvation of the grace of God. That’s the charter of our freedom, as a grace preacher of the gospel. Arminianism can add nothing whatsoever to what we have been talking about. In fact, it can only cloud the freeness of the grace of God, because this grace is as wide as the earth and it is as long as eternal time.

May God help you to come. Come believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust in him. Come to magnify the grace of God. May, as Paul and others, may you rejoice in the Savior, who loved us to the uttermost.

Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for these magnificent words of Paul. “I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace.” The gospel of the grace of God; how fortunate we are. We praise Thee, Lord, that this gospel, the gospel of grace, that glorifies our Father, as He who saves, and the Son, as He who has executed the saving work, and the Holy Spirit, as the one who applies it. O Father, if there should be someone in this audience who is not yet come to Christ, may it be at this very moment they call upon him, believe in him, trust in him. Come.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.